



Holy War in the Bible: Christian Morality and an Old Testament Problem

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Making Peace with God at War

The image of God at war is troubling, to say the least. In the Old Testament in particular, it is often thought that God is the author of genocide and ethnic cleansing. And yet, while the psalmist celebrates God's sometimes violent victories, the prophet grieves over the pain God causes his people. In the New Testament, Paul deploys warfare imagery, and the book of Revelation is shot through with violence, yet Jesus commands his followers to turn the other cheek. How might one appropriately interpret the various texts and develop an overarching theology of divine warfare? Is it possible to make a biblical case for "holy war," as those behind the Crusades may have attempted? And how should Christians address the morality of war today?

Editors Heath A. Thomas, Jeremy Evans and Paul Copan seek to respond to these questions and more in *Holy War in the Bible*, an interdisciplinary study that fundamentally advances the scholarly discussion by moving beyond traditional biblical studies of holy war. The volume is designed as a kind of "reader," a resource that will enable discussion and deliberation from a number of different perspectives: biblical, ethical, philosophical and theological.

If willing to delve into one of the most bewildering pictures of God Scripture presents, the reader will be treated to a panoply of insights from the most current scholarship in a variety of fields. For instance:

- Joshua scholar Douglas Earl unearths the truth about whether the book of Joshua was in fact used to support the Crusades, as is commonly assumed.
- Associate professor of Old Testament at Duke Divinity School Stephen B. Chapman carefully delineates between the popular scholarship term of "holy war" and how Scripture actually refers to divine warfare.
- Heath Thomas, whose research has focused on underexplored voices of pain in the Bible, reveals the significant contribution that the book of Lamentations makes.
- David T. Lamb, author of *God Behaving Badly* and associate professor of Old Testament at Biblical Theological Seminary, demonstrates that anger and compassion are the principle motivators behind God's violent judgments.
- Noted Kierkegaard scholar Murray Rae provides a survey of the Christian just war theory and pacifist traditions from the church fathers to the twentieth century.

In the end, while the editors do not presume to provide the final word on the problems of war and violence in the Bible, they do map out a positive paradigm highlighting the philosophical/ethical and theological/biblical considerations that should guide future investigations in their hermeneutically helpful afterword.

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